

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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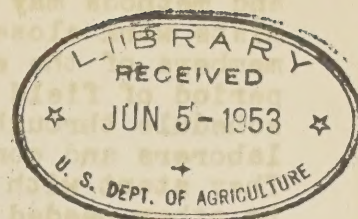
310 REPORT OF TRIP TO PUERTO RICO

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by

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During my visit with the Agricultural Extension Service in Puerto Rico, time was devoted to conferences and discussions of economic programs and activities with Director Huyke and with Mr. Luis A. Suarez and his staff. Time was also spent with Mrs. Judith Frias de Ramirez and her staff, who handle the work on consumer and retailer marketing education. Field trips were made with Mr. Suarez which included two commodity leader training meetings. One was devoted to sweetpotatoes and the other to mangoes. Those participating were extension specialists, supervisors, county farm and home agents, and research and agency persons. They considered the subject matter and procedures very broadly and intensively from the standpoint of production, marketing, distribution, and consumption, and the problems and points of view of producers, handlers, and consumers. These were excellent illustrations of good subject matter, methods, and training techniques and agency working relationships. The Santurce market information center was also visited with Mrs. Ramirez. The 2-hour food information program, with a demonstration on food preparation, conducted at this center by the consumer specialist and county farm and home agents was most interesting and impressive. This educational service is given in certain of the markets twice a week and is accomplishing much in improved preparation, handling, and buying practices of producers, handlers, and consumers.

In 1946, Puerto Rico received a special fund of \$50,000 per year for work with cooperatives, which includes farmers, laborers, and consumers, in addition to the regular extension economists work. Under the Agricultural Marketing Act (RMA Title II) they have two projects, one entitled "Developing and conducting new educational work in marketing," and the other "Making Puerto Ricans better buyers through consumer education."

The Island is approximately 100 miles long and 35 miles wide, with a total population of 2,300,000. There are 53,500 farms containing 1,845,000 acres. Seventy percent of the farms are from 3 to 20 acres in size. There are also a large number (51,157) of small "parcelas" of at least $\frac{1}{4}$ acre, but less than 3 acres, on which crops and animals are produced.

In general, the economics programs in Puerto Rico are organized and conducted under methods and procedures similar to those in many of the States. Under particular differences in problems, emphasis

and methods may vary widely from those in the States. The economists work closely with research and agency workers and with other members of the extension staff. They have no particular peak period of field demands and activities, but carry a heavy field schedule throughout the year. A great deal of work is done with laborers and consumers on consumer and credit union cooperatives. They start with the interest of the individual or group and move to other needed programs and practices for betterment.

Specifically the more important activities and methods in the economics extension program being given major emphasis are as follows:

FARM MANAGEMENT

Agriculture is the primary industry, but in spite of the agricultural nature of its economy, Puerto Rico does not supply its own food. About 42 percent in volume and 54 percent in value of the foodstuffs consumed in the Island are imported, chiefly from the United States. The need is for more and higher quality production on the Island. The 10 to 40-acre farmers are the largest group to work with. The most needed changes are in farm organization and operation practices to include higher combination of high-profit enterprises and higher intensity of operation. Meetings, schools, demonstrations, accounts, and farm and home planning are important methods. As a whole, farm management extension work is being conducted with the goal of raising farm income and farm family standards of living. To attain this goal they are emphasizing two lines of effort, namely, increasing the real money incomes of farms and farm laborers and improving homemaking and family living.

OUTLOOK

Outlook activity by the department of agricultural economics has been developing successfully. The special interest shown by the farmers of the Island in the acquisition of more economic information dealing with expected changes or trends in the agricultural situation points out the need of giving more emphasis to this activity. Their recognition of the value of annual outlook, as an aid in intelligently organizing farm production for obtaining the benefits of local as well as foreign markets, is very significant.

The work performed by the department in outlook information has been primarily conducted with sugarcane, tobacco, cotton, and coffee growers. Through extension schools and conferences, this economic information is given to farmers engaged in the previously mentioned enterprises. Besides the use of these extension methods, individual contact visits to farmers, as well as the use of radio talks, news releases, and other means of communication are employed to convey the necessary economic information to all the farmers of the Island.

Other Federal and insular agencies, such as the Production and Marketing Administration, the department of agriculture and commerce, Federal farm credit agencies, and Federal and insular experiment stations, are cooperating in conducting the department's work.

MARKETING

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A. Commodity Marketing

1. Tomatoes.--A program for fostering the quality of this product was set up at Villalba, where one of our best marketing cooperatives exists. Method demonstrations on tomato picking, handling, and classification were given to the producers. Emphasis was placed on the use of padded field boxes and more efficient transportation to avoid bruising of fruits. A program for the training of this cooperative personnel in packing practices is to be undertaken with the coming crop. Assistance was given in the installation of a new piece of machinery for the washing, waxing, sorting, and sizing of tomatoes. This will improve the quality of the crop and reduce classification costs about 50 percent. A leaflet on quality improvement was prepared.
2. Pigeon peas.--A strong program for the improvement of pigeon peas is underway, too. The insular experiment station is cooperating with two field experiments on planting distance and fertilization. We have had an intensive campaign of visiting farmers and conducting meetings to train farmers in technical agricultural practices to insure a better quality crop. The production of a single variety is highly stressed and, together with proper seed selection and conservation, is highly emphasized in meetings. For years pigeon pea was neglected by farmers. Now it is a \$350,000 business, and in the coming years this amount will be easily surpassed.
3. Oranges.--Visits to orange producers and meetings with them have been successful in the discussion of their marketing problems. Some years ago great quantities of oranges were lost on the farms, because they sold so cheap that farmers did not bother to market them. The establishment of a concrete frozen pack plant has changed this situation. Oranges are assets on the farms now. An important problem now is helping farmers in crop improvement. A series of meetings was conducted with orange producers for training in proper picking practices, maturity of fruits, use of padded field boxes, and adequate handling of the picked product to avoid bruising, and care in a strict sorting to avoid rots, cuts, and some other defective fruits.
4. Mangoes.--Mangoes can be shipped to the United States markets provided they are fumigated and comply with mango bylaws issued by the insular department of agriculture. This will bring returns to farmers for a

product which they have neglected. To help producers in the marketing of this fruit, a training meeting was held at the insular experiment station at Mayaguez. Packing demonstrations had been given to shippers of this product. Farmers are going to be trained in the use of the picking pole and in the classification, packing, and handling of the fruits. Large marketing activities will be worked out for the coming year's crop.

5. Bananas.--Both experimental and commercial shipments of Montecristo banana have been promoted. Apparently this variety has very little probability of success in the United States markets.

The first banana-ripening plant has been established in Puerto Rico to serve the metropolitan area with ripened bananas. It has a capacity of 600 banana bunches in its four ripening rooms. Shipment of fresh fruit to the United States could take care of the large banana production in summer and fall.

6. Starchy vegetables (tapias, sweetpotatoes, plantains, yam, and the like).--Assistance has been given to farmers in making contacts with buyers of starchy vegetable crops for shipping and local sales. Meetings have been conducted to discuss the specifications of the buyers, and field demonstrations given to train farmers in these. Strict sorting and careful handling of these crops have been very helpful in quality improvement. The packing of clean and sound products has been stressed.

7. Pineapple.--A pineapple growers' marketing cooperative association is in process of organization by both the department of cooperatives and the marketing division of the insular department of agriculture. Before the organization of the cooperative association, a corporation will be organized. The Land Authority of Puerto Rico will control it. In business dealings farmers will be treated by the corporation as if it were a cooperative. Quality programs will be stressed for products for both the fresh market and the cannery.

B. Cooperative Marketing

Assistance has been given to 13 groups of farmers who are interested in the organization of marketing cooperatives.

Training meetings on the different functions have been offered to these groups. They have also been assisted in obtaining new marketing outlets for their farm produce. Chartered cooperatives at Villalba, Aguada, Barranquitas, and Lares, vegetable producer cooperatives, and consumers' cooperatives have been similarly assisted in their marketing programs.

C. Marketing Facilities

An Island-wide marketing facilities program is being developed in cooperation with the State Department of Agriculture wherein one major facility will be located at San Juan to handle all imports and exports, supported by seven or eight regional markets within the Island to assist farmers and consumers effectively and efficiently. The cooperative leadership developed by Extension is mainly supplying the local initiative needed in launching this important program.

D. Program for Retailers and Other Handlers

Several activities have been carried out at market places all over the Island, for the improvement in appearance of the physical aspect of counters and the products displayed. Such activities include better arrangement of products on counters, cleaning of counters and surroundings, better arrangement of products by classes and sizes, more efficient handling and storage of perishables, sorting and taking off of rotten stuff from perishables on exhibition, and the use of sprinklers. Most of these activities have been carried out in the market places of Santurce, Fajardo, Juncos, Yabucoa, Humacao, Cayey, Cidra, Isabela, and Rio Grande. At the Santurce market some of the counters were completely rebuilt.

E. Consumer Marketing Program

Short courses on classification, quality improvement, handling, and storage of vegetables were offered to retailers all over the Island. Retailers were encouraged to rearrange the products in their stands to insure a more uniform and attractive appearance.

The more important activities and methods in the consumer and retailer education programs being given major emphasis are as follows:

1. Consumer Education

- a. Information Centers.--The information centers are one of the chief activities of the consumer education program. They are organized in the larger market places in the Island and located near the main entrances. Information is given about agricultural food products in season, different varieties of these products that can be found in the market, their nutritional value, how to buy them, how to prepare them, and how to serve them in different ways. Method demonstrations on food preparation and preservation are offered.

At present there are three information centers, at Santurce, Ponce, and San German.

- b. Short Courses for Adults.--Short courses are offered to adults on:

- (1) Wise buying.
- (2) Labeling and grading of canned foods.
- (3) Bills and regulations that protect the consumer.

Demonstrations are given on selection of fruits and vegetables.

- c. Radio Work.--A weekly radio program by WRIO is offered. This year 173 radio programs have been prepared and broadcast.

In cooperation with the Office of Price Stabilization two weekly programs are prepared and broadcast.

2. Retailer Education

- a. Short Courses.--Emphasis has been given to the improvement of market places and the education of retailers.

Short courses are offered to retailers in cooperation with the department of health. These short courses consist of six classes:

- (1) The way of sanitation.
- (2) Sanitary handling of food products.
- (3) Personal hygiene.
- (4) Classification and selection of agricultural products.
- (5) Organization of display in market places, cooperative stores, and grocery stores.
- (6) Better salesmanship.

- b. After the short courses are offered to retailers a follow-up is continued on the improvement of counters.

- c. Improvement of Market Places.--Activities have been carried on in the improvement of the market places of Santurce, Fajardo, Juncos, Yabucoa, Humacao, Cayey, Cidra, Rio Grande, and Isabela.

Market places have been reorganized and rebuilt, for example, those at Fajardo and Yabucoa, and plans for the improvement of the market place at Isabela are on their way.

Other Programs

Farm Labor and Farm Labor Efficiency.--Farm labor extension education in Puerto Rico is conducted with the cooperation of the insular department of

labor. This joint program has been planned to improve landlord-tenant relations, to train farm laborers who annually migrate to the United States to work on fruit and vegetable farms, and to stimulate farm work simplification and farm and home safety.

Major Observations

Extension work in Puerto Rico has an interesting history. Although some work was conducted earlier, organized extension work was started in 1936. It was founded on the best experience of the United States of America, coupled with any new and local situations and features that would make its program the most effective and efficient for the people. It was born in a period of great new needs and opportunities for the Extension Service. Its leadership has well appraised these new needs and planned and developed its program accordingly. One of the new approaches deals specifically with extension's responsibility to consumers as well as producers. Another deals with organized means and methods for effective cooperation with other agencies having recognized programs of assistance to agriculture. A third recognizes that since present agricultural problems are more largely economic than formerly, agricultural economics should be effectively organized and made a definite part of the whole extension program. From its very beginning Puerto Rico has had a competent staff of extension economists. The present director of extension is, and each of the former directors has been, professionally trained and nationally recognized in the economics field.

Conclusions

Puerto Rico has an effective and highly regarded extension program in agricultural economics. This program seems well balanced between work with producers, handlers, and consumers, in the joint participation with other specialists, and in integration with the whole extension program. Joint participation with the home economics staff in the particular fields of retailer and consumer education is an outstanding and highly favorable part of the program.

Puerto Rico has much to offer other Extension Services, both in its broad concepts and procedures in program determination, and in the special attention it is giving to the problems of low-income people. The program would seem to have the broad principles and approaches necessary for the years ahead.

This contact has fully convinced me of the particular and special assistance the Puerto Rican Extension Service can give to representatives of other nations in gaining a practical understanding of the United States program. They not only have a broad, practical, and effective program which is applicable to the conditions of many other nations, but they also speak the language of many of those nations. A plan for such assistance, however, should be organized and agreed upon and would require additional funds and staff to meet the added responsibilities.

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